Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: The Thomas Lord Audley School

Monkwick Avenue, Monkwick, Colchester, Essex CO2 8NJ

Inspection dates: 25 and 26 March 2025

Outcome

The Thomas Lord Audley School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Simon Essex. This school is part of The Sigma Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Lyn Wright, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Susan Hammond.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils thrive at The Thomas Lord Audley School. They appreciate many aspects of school life and particularly enjoy the excellent relationships they build with staff. Pupils, parents and carers praise the high-quality pastoral care that the school provides. Pupils know that there is always someone available to listen if they need extra help. They are safe and very well cared for.

The school has high expectations for its pupils and takes pride in celebrating individual success. Pupils achieve well throughout their time at school. Teachers create an environment where pupils are fully engaged in their learning. Strategies such as 'no opt-out' help ensure that all pupils participate fully in their lessons. Pupils enjoy their learning and work hard to succeed.

There is a strong sense of warmth and community across the school. Pupils are polite and friendly. They focus well in lessons, and any disruption to learning is rare. If it does occur, teachers respond quickly and effectively so that learning continues with minimal interruption. During social time and lesson transitions, pupils behave calmly and sensibly. They interact very positively with others. They enjoy taking part in lunchtime activities such as bingo or playing sports such as football or basketball.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have ensured that pupils benefit from a well-planned, ambitious curriculum that prepares them effectively for the next stage of their education. Pupils access a broad range of subjects, and an increasing number study a modern foreign language at GCSE.

Teachers are confident in the subjects they teach. Their strong subject knowledge allows them to explain new ideas clearly and provide pupils with tasks that bring learning to life. Teachers use thoughtful strategies such as questioning to check pupils' understanding. Pupils value the opportunity to revisit and consolidate key knowledge. As a result, they remember what they have been taught and often apply their learning very well.

Pupils frequently benefit from clear, timely feedback that helps them to improve their work. For example, in modern foreign languages, teachers check that pupils have understood the vocabulary and grammar before moving on to extended writing. Pupils receive the time they need to practise individual skills, which builds their confidence and understanding. Where this happens routinely it enables pupils to achieve well.

However, this is not consistent across the curriculum. Sometimes, pupils do not receive the same clarity of feedback or guidance. On these occasions, pupils are less clear about how to improve and do not deepen their learning as well as they could.

The school has made reading a key priority. A well-implemented reading strategy supports pupils to develop their reading fluency and confidence. This helps them to access the demanding curriculum successfully.

Support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is highly effective. Teachers understand pupils' needs and are skilled in using strategies to help them succeed. The SEND team, including the special educational needs coordinators, works closely with the pastoral team to ensure pupils receive joined-up support. Communication with families is timely and supportive. As a result, pupils with SEND achieve well from their individual starting points.

Expectations for behaviour are high, and pupils meet them well. They often demonstrate high levels of self-control and a strong motivation to learn. Pupils enjoy school and attend regularly. A small number of pupils find it harder to meet the school's high standards. Staff provide targeted support to help them succeed, including carefully planned alternative provision where needed.

The school promotes pupils' personal development effectively. Pupils have opportunities to explore different views and beliefs. Older pupils, in particular, show maturity and respect when discussing different perspectives. However, younger pupils do not always demonstrate the same level of understanding or respect for difference. This makes a minority of pupils feel uncomfortable.

Leaders, including those from the trust, have worked effectively to secure continued progress. Since the last inspection, there have been sustained improvements in pupils'

academic achievement, attendance and behaviour. Leaders have established a highly positive school culture. Parents and staff are overwhelmingly supportive and positive about the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, teachers do not consistently provide pupils with the most effective guidance on how to improve their work. When this happens, pupils do not know how to get better or deepen their understanding. The school should ensure teachers consistently provide pupils with appropriate support and guidance so pupils are confident in how to achieve as well as they could.
- A minority of pupils do not demonstrate a strong understanding of those who are different from themselves. As a result, some younger pupils do not speak to others with sufficiently high levels of respect. The school should ensure that all pupils develop a deep understanding of, and respect for, difference, so they are able to celebrate each other's individuality.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in April 2016.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use Ofsted Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further guidance on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for published performance information about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the definition of children in need of help and protection; pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's pupil premium funding (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	137937
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10379970
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	924
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Susan Hammond
CEO of the trust	Lyn Wright
Headteacher	Simon Essex
Website	www.tla.essex.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	4 and 5 February 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school uses three registered and 13 unregistered alternative provisions.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed the ongoing impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with trust staff, including the CEO of the trust. They also met with the headteacher, deputy headteachers and senior staff, including those with responsibility for pupils with SEND.
- Inspector met with trustees and governors, including the chair of trustees and the chair of governors.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors scrutinised documents relating to school improvement and governance, behaviour and attendance, alternative provision, enrichment and careers, pupils with SEND and the school's reading strategy. They also held meetings with staff with responsibilities in these areas.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View. They also spoke to groups of pupils and took into consideration the online staff and pupil surveys.

Inspection team

Bessie Owen, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Sally Nutman	Ofsted Inspector

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